

HOW TO BEGIN

- Begin with yourself and work backward, one step at a time
- Compile information from family members, Bible records, and other personal sources
- Check for books on local and family history
- Use census, vital statistics, and cemetery records
- Look for obituaries using known dates of death
- Continue by researching county or city court records, such as deeds, wills, and order books
- Consult guides to African American resources in other libraries and archives
- Remember always to record the source of any information found

HELPFUL BOOKS FOR THE BEGINNER

Beasley, Donna. *Family Pride: The Complete Guide to Tracing African-American Genealogy*. New York, 1997.

Beller, Susan P. *Roots For Kids: A Genealogy Guide For Young People*. White Hall, Va., 1989.

Byers, Paula K., ed. *African American Genealogical Sourcebook*. New York, 1995.

Croom, Emily A. *Unpuzzling Your Past: A Basic Guide to Genealogy*. 3rd ed. Cincinnati, 1995.

Fears, Mary L. Jackson. *Slave Ancestral Research: It's Something Else*. Bowie, Md., 1995.

Peters, Joan W. *Local Sources For African-American Family Historians: Using County Court Records and Census Returns*. Broad Run, Va., 1993.

Streets, David H. *Slave Genealogy: A Research Guide With Case Studies*. Bowie, Md., 1986.

Woodtor, Dee. *Finding A Place Called Home: A Guide to African-American Genealogy and Historical Identity*. New York, 1999.

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The Library of Virginia is located at 800 East Broad Street in downtown Richmond, Virginia. The hours are 9:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M., Monday through Saturday, holidays excepted.

The Library staff members are available to provide advice and assistance in using the library and the resources in its collection. However, it is not possible for us to do extended genealogical research for patrons. If you have questions about using materials in our collection or our patron services, you may call Archives Reference at (804) 692-3888.

We invite you to visit us online at www.lva.lib.va.us.

Cover image from the collections of the Library of Virginia: David Hunter Strother, *Contrabands in Virginia*, pen-and-ink sketches, 1862.



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Resources For AFRICAN AMERICAN GENEALOGICAL RESEARCH



VITAL STATISTICS RECORDS

Beginning in June 1853, births, deaths, and marriages were recorded on the state level. These records include slave births and deaths (indexed and recorded by the owner's name). The Library has birth and death records on microfilm for 1853–1896, death records for 1912–1939, and marriage records for 1853–1935. There are statewide indexes to the births and marriages; deaths are indexed from 1912 to 1954. The recording of births and deaths was not strictly enforced prior to 1896, and many were not reported.

CENSUS RECORDS

Virginia federal census records are available for the years 1810–1920 (the 1890 census is missing for all states.) The Virginia slave schedules list names of owners, the sex and ages of slaves, but do not report the names of slaves. The slave schedules were compiled only in 1850 and 1860.

Some census records from the mid-atlantic, southern, and midwestern states are also available at the Library of Virginia.

COUNTY AND CITY COURT RECORDS

The surviving court records (deeds, wills, marriages, etc.) prior to 1865 for each county of Virginia are available on microfilm in the West Reading Room. Microfilm of county records from 1865 to 1900 or after is also available for many localities.

The collection of county records includes the surviving Free Negro Registers; a complete listing of them is available in the Archives Research Room.

NEWSPAPERS

The Library of Virginia has microfilm or original copies of most surviving Virginia newspapers published since 1736. Several African American newspapers published in Virginia are included in the collection. There are few newspaper indexes available, but an obituary may be found if the approximate date of death is known.

CEMETERY RECORDS

Cemetery records and tombstone inscriptions from many areas of Virginia are available at the Library. A guide to Virginia cemetery records is available at each reference desk. Interment records for all major Richmond City cemeteries are on microfilm in the West Reading Room.

THE FREEDMEN'S BUREAU

Records of the Virginia state headquarters of the Freedmen's Bureau, 1865–1870, are available on microfilm. These records are unindexed, poorly arranged, and contain little genealogical information. Most Freedmen's Bureau records have not been microfilmed; the original records are on file at the National Archives.

A census of the freedmen was taken in 1865, and cohabitation registers legitimizing slave marriages were compiled in 1866. Fewer than twenty of the registers and censuses created by the Freedmen's Bureau in Virginia have been identified in various federal, state, and local repositories. None are part of the microfilmed National Archives records. A list of these registers and their locations is available in the Archives Research Room.

WORLD WAR I VETERANS

Questionnaires were sent to Virginia veterans immediately after World War I, asking for personal information such as date and place of birth, names of parents, wives, and children, religious and fraternal affiliation, education, occupation, service record, and wartime experiences. These were sometimes returned with photographs. The questionnaires are available on microfilm in the West Reading Room. This collection is also available through our Web site.

MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION

The Library has copies of more than five thousand Bible records in its collection, including some with references to African American individuals, including slaves. This collection can be searched through our Web site. For a listing of those Bible records that mention slaves, search using the keywords "slave" or "slaves."

Other manuscript records include genealogical notes and charts, church records, business records, and personal papers. Please note that there are few plantation records in the collections of the Library of Virginia.

PRINTED BOOKS

The Library has a large collection of family histories, local histories, abstracts of state and local records, genealogical how-to books, and genealogical and historical periodicals. The collection contains many books about the history and culture of African Americans, Virginia, and the South. The Library's catalog may be searched through our Web site.